

## **Expressed Turnover Intention: Alternate Method for Knowing Turnover Intention and Eradicating Common Method Bias**

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**Abstract.** Employees are the building blocks and valuable assets in an organization. Organizational researchers and practitioners have shown a burgeoning attention to satisfy and retain key performer as the cost of leaving a job is very high for the employing organizations. Discovering turnover intention in its formation stages is very crucial, not only to resist its' piled up effect but also to control the actual turnover in the future. Most of the times, management is not aware of the employee's quit intention because employees don't show their intention explicitly until they actually leave the organization. However, majority of the times employees share their feeling with their colleagues or other close work mates. Based on positive relationship at work, we argued that the individuals who work together normally share their feelings with their close colleagues regarding their decision of leaving or staying (expressed turnover intention) with the current employer. Therefore, the objective of the current study is to investigate the relationship between turnover intention and expressed turnover intention. Furthermore, we offer a new perspective to data collection from other sources, which will assist us in shortening the questionnaire, also minimizing the common method bias and knowing the quit intention from other source. Finally, theoretical and practical implications along with direction for future studies are also discussed.

### **1. Introduction**

Employees are the building blocks and valuable assets in an organization [1]. Organizational scholars and practitioners have shown a burgeoning attention to satisfy and retain key performer as the cost of leaving a job is very high for both; the employee itself and for the employing organizations [2]. Employee retention is coveted as the organizations invest lots of money and effort, directly or indirectly, on employees' recruitment, selection, training and development [3-5]. Turnover costs suffered by the organizations incorporate departure costs (post quit surveys, administrative time, and reserved salary), replacement costs (training expenses), and staffing costs (publicizing costs, the amount of time spent, test evaluation, candidate screening, individual verification, travel expenses [6]. Moreover, withdrawal of employees may also result in loss of firm specific intellectual (knowledge, expertise, and experience) and social capital; it disrupts organizational operations [7-9]; increased risk of information and technology sharing with competitors which ultimately decrease organization's overall effectiveness [6, 8]. As every organization wants to attract and retain their key employees [4], therefore, in today's competitive and dynamic work environment, it has become more challenging for organizations to reduce the turnover intention among employees, lessen their job-hopping, maintain their commitment and satisfaction, thus retain the high-performing workforce.

Turnover intention is a widespread phenomenon of interest to the fields of organizational behavior, psychology [10, 11], economics and sociology [10] because it is strongly related to actual turnover and voluntarily withdrawal of employees [10, 12-15]. The investigation of turnover intention and actual turnover has been proliferating [8,16], in a couple of decades to find out the answer "why do people leave?" and "why do they stay?"[2]. Over the years, researchers and practitioners have identified the number of factors associated with the turnover intentions. The main

strand of the literatures primarily concentrated on limited antecedents to turnover intention and actual turnover [17] such as job dissatisfaction [10, 18], lower commitment [10, 19], general adjustment [18], stress or job tension [10], justice [20]. The findings from these studies suggest that higher organizational commitment, job satisfaction and fairness at work are negatively related with turnover intention. The second strand linked the behavioral aspects to turnover intentions such as absenteeism, lateness, low productivity, tardiness, employee's low level of self-confidence [21]. However, these predictors of turnover intention do not explain their relationships meaningfully. The third strand of research mainly highlighted the cognitive process. In this process, individuals compare the costs and benefits of their work and they also compare themselves and their positions with peers and then take their staying or termination decision.

Discovering turnover intention in its formation stages is very crucial in order to resist its' piled up effect and to control the actual turnover in the future. Over a number of years, researchers have proposed various theories and constructs to comprehend and foreshadow job quits (voluntary job quits) [16]. Most of the times, management is not aware of the employee's actual quit intention because employees don't show it explicitly until they actually take a decision to leave the organization. Man is a social animal and he prefers living in groups rather than staying in isolation even at the workplace also. Based on positive relationship of employees with their colleagues at work, it would be right to say that majority of the times employees share their feeling with their colleagues or close work mates. Accordingly, in current study, researchers argue that individuals at workplace normally share their feelings with their close workplace friends about leaving or staying (expressed turnover intention) with the current organization.

Top management can identify turnover intention of employees through their close co-workers at workplace and take precautions to eradicate it. Therefore, the objective of the study is to investigate the relationship between the self-report turnover intention of employees and expressed turnover intention (i.e. what they share with others). By examining the relationship between the self-report turnover intention and expressed turnover intention with best and closed colleagues, our study contributes to several streams of research. First, turnovers are expensive [22], which motivate organizational practitioners to find out ways to prevent it. Preventive measures can only be adopted if management has some knowledge or awareness of the issue before hand. Our study recommends alternative source for collecting information about turnover intention of employees other than self reported measure and hence facilitates in minimizing and eradicating actual turnover of employees. In this way, this study helps the management in assessing the actual turnover intention of employees whose reliable data might not be gathered directly from them. Secondly, common method biases are problematic as it causes error or response biases in data. In order to minimize the common method biases, researchers are keen to identify the best suitable source or multiple sources for data collection [23, 24]. Moreover, common data source for all constructs under observation also introduce mono-method biases into the study which is a great threat for the construct validity and deceive the researchers by inflating or deflating the relationship among constructs [25]. In this study, we emphasized that through utilizing multiple source for data collection other than self-reported information, we can rule out the possibility of common method bias as well as mono-method bias from organizational/social research. Thirdly, getting long questionnaire filled up is also one of the huge problems for data collection. Lindell & Whitney (2001) in their study asserted that lengthy questionnaire result in respondent's tediousness, exhaustion and shifts their attention from providing accurate answers towards quick questionnaire completion. In response to this problem, we offer a new perspective in our study for data collection from other source, which is helpful in shorten the questionnaire. It would minimize the burden on respondents and will ultimately produce more reliable and efficient responses.

This paper is based on the following structure: Firstly, with the help of literature, the basic concepts relevant to employee turnover intention and common method biases will be explained. Subsequently, the relationship between turnover intention and expressed turnover intention will be established, leading towards our hypothesis, which is followed by methodology and study findings. The last section will discuss conclusion and future recommendations.

## 2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

**2.1 Turnover Intention.** In literature, turnover intention is expressed interchangeably with intention to quit and leave or turnover intention [27]. It is comprised of psychological, cognitive and behavioral aspects [27]. It reflects the employee's subjective tendency that he will leave the organization at some future time period [28-29]. Turnover intention can be defined as cognitive manifestation, deliberate and conscious willingness of an employee to leave the organization which lead towards behavioural decision to quit [10, 14, 30]; not only the location but also the job, his/her respective work duties, current employer [14] and look forward to an alternative employment opportunity [10]. The development of turnover intention can be explained by the help of equity theory. Adams' equity theory [32] states that when individual or employee thinks that their efforts and works are not rewarded accordingly by the organization or reward is not equal among all employees; they may feel dissatisfied and it leads towards development of turnover intention. The extant literature authenticates that intention to quit can be utilized as an efficient predictor of actual withdrawal and as a proxy for turnover [13, 33]. It is an indicator of those employees who are not working at their full potential [34] and also illustrates the level of an employee's psychological commitment to the organization [29].

**2.2. Common Method Variance.** Common method bias/variance also referred to as the systematic and nonrandom component of method biases. It is introduced into the study when data is collected via single survey instrument or at the same point in time [24]. It is the amount of divergence in the measure owing to methodology utilized for the measurement of the construct [35], and it generates spurious correlation between study variables due to employing common methods in data collection [36-38]. According to previous studies, common method variances are problematic due to their confounding impact on the actual phenomenon under investigation [23, 24]. Such method biases may deprive the actual or true explanation of observed relationships between measured constructs [23, 39] and lead towards drawing deceptive results [23, 24, 40] and threaten the validity of the results by depicting misleading associations between measures [38].

Non-random biases may be introduced into some study due to experimenter, experimental, halo effects [42], yes and no saying, acquiescence [23], social desirability [23, 37, 41], vague wording or phrasing, length of scale, overlapping of item contents [37] etc. In their study, Podsakoff et al. (2003) classified these myriad factors into different categories such as use of common source or rate, item characteristics, item context, and measurement context effects.

The survey based studies, in which respondents react to the items of a questionnaire at a similar point in time, are more vulnerable to common method bias [24, 26, 33, 39]. The extant literature advocates that when self-reported methods are utilized, as an exclusive source of data gathering, they causes percept-percept inflation in the observed relationships [43] and mono-method biases in the estimates [25].

The phenomenon of common method biases has extensive history in social studies. The debate about the influence of these biases dates back over 50 years [23, 24]. Measurement errors are particularly grave in behavioral studies because the majority of the research in this particular discipline is concerned with measurement of abstraction of variables, which are not directly observable and researchers need to build up abstract, complex, hard to measure constructs [42-43]. Cote and Buckley [42] examined 70 studies and reported that in social sciences research measures error accounts for considerable variance, e.g. 15.8% in marketing, 23.8% in other business fields, 28.9% in psychology and sociology, and 30.5% in education, is due to these error components. The social researchers started to acknowledge, since last four decades, common method variance as one of the potential issues in behavioral studies [23, 24]. Accordingly, it does not astonish that common method bias is among the most repeatedly discussed issues by social scientists as self-reported surveys are widely used for data accumulation in social sciences including psychology [49], organizational research [55], marketing [38] and information system [52].

**2.3. Turnover Intention and Expressed Turnover Intention.** Asian culture, particularly Pakistani culture is a collective culture where people share their feelings and thoughts with people

close to them, discuss their personal and professional issues with each other, remain loyal and maintain long term and strong commitment to their family and friends. Employees, with close ties at work, dine together (during lunch breaks), spend their leisure time together and prefer to use same transport in order to reduce their expenses which further strengthen their relationship. Accordingly, employees often share their quit plans with the co-workers and this sharing is based on a variety of reasons: for emotional support and for getting access to other networks for seeking alternative employment opportunities[36]. In this study, turnover intention alludes to voluntary desire to quit the organization. It includes the consideration of job quitting; job search which eventually forms a person's quit intention [44]. It has been argued that employees feel reluctant to disclose their actual withdrawal intention directly to the management or human resource department for the potential termination from job, but they express their quit intentions with the workers close to them at work. We suggest that employee's expressed turnover intention can be used as a best source for tracing out their actual turnover intention. Therefore, we hypothesize that;

*H1: There is an association between turnover intention of an employee and his expressed turnover intention with his close mate at work.*

### 3. Methods

**3.1. Sample and Procedure.** Data was gathered in 2017 from individuals working in diverse organizations (e.g., banks, service organizations, manufacturing organizations, educational institutions, etc.) of Pakistan to enhance the study generalizability. It took approximately two months for data collection. The data was collected through self-administered survey instrument by employing convenience sampling technique. The survey questionnaires were prepared in English as it is used as formal and official language in Pakistan. As the respondents of this study were the individuals who have minimum 14 years of education, so it was not difficult for them to fill up a survey in English. It took approximately 5-10 minutes for each respondent to complete the questionnaire. Two questionnaires were prepared: one for the respondent and the other for the respondent's best/close friend at work. Each survey questionnaire include two sections. In first section of both questionnaires, respondents and their best friends were asked to provide information regarding demographics including their age, gender, marital status, education level, employing organization, tenure with current organization, name of their close mate/ best friend at work, duration of their friendship and tenure of their working together. The second section of the respondent's questionnaire, the information regarding his turnover intention was asked. Whereas, the second section of best friend's survey consisted of the queries related to expressed turnover intention with a close friend at work. This study follows cross-sectional design as all data was collected from employees on-site during paid working hours. Study setting was non-contrived because the researchers did not have any influence over natural work environments. The researchers' interference was limited only to the explanation of study purpose and questionnaire items to the respondents so that they can fill the questionnaire easily and provide best possible responses. Data was collected with integrity and the respondents were guaranteed of full anonymity and it was assured to them that aggregated data would only be used for research purpose.

The study participants and their close friends at work were surveyed at two points in time in order to reduce common method bias. At time 1 (T1), 213 questionnaires were distributed among individuals. Out of 213 distributed surveys, we received back 165 usable questionnaires. The majority of the respondents were males (i.e. 70.5%). As far as the education is concerned, 93% were graduate and post-graduate degree holders. Average age of the participants was 29.02 years (SD = 5.01), and they had 3.69 years of average working tenure with the employing organization. The actual participants and their close mate had a relationship period of 3.77 years, and their working together duration was 2.87 years. At time 2 (T2) (2 weeks after T1), data was collected from participant's best friends at work that they mentioned at time 1 (T1). Total 165 questionnaires were distributed and we got back 150 completely filled questionnaires (response rate = 90.90 %). To match the participant's responses with his/her best friend's response, the researchers assigned

unique identification numbers to questionnaires. After matching the data collected across the two time periods, 132 participants' data was usable for further analysis.

After data collection, for further analyses the questionnaire items were coded before entering into the SPSS.

**3.2. Measurement of Variables.** All items were measured using 5 point Likert type scale ranging from 1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree.

**3.2.1. Turnover Intention.** We measured turnover intention with 3-items scale developed by Mobley et al. (1978) which measures the participant's self-reported intention to leave the job. The mean of 3 items of turnover intention was 3.09 (SD = 0.99). Mobley et al. (1978) reported Cronbach's alpha value of this scale 0.9 as in the present study it was  $\alpha = 0.86$ .

**3.2.2. Expressed Turnover Intention.** For measuring expressed turnover intention, we adapted turnover intention measure developed by Mobley et al. (1978). This original scale was modified to obtain (see Appendix A) and evaluate participant's shared intention to quit (expressed turnover intention) the job in near future. The mean for 3 items of expressed turnover intention was 3.22 (SD = 1.03). Cronbach's alpha value of reliability for this scale was  $\alpha = 0.83$ .

**3.2.3. Control Variables.** This study was controlled for age, gender, educational level/qualification, tenure with current organization (in years), relationship duration (in years) and working together tenure of participants and their close friends at work (in years) for their potential impact on the relationship between turnover intention and expressed turnover intention.

## 4. Results

Table 1 summarizes means, standard deviations, reliabilities and correlations values for control and studied variables. For the purpose of examining strength and direction of relationship between self-reported turnover intention and expressed turnover intention, Bivariate Correlation was adopted. The results of analyses showed strong positive correlation between self-reported turnover intention and expressed turnover intention ( $r = 0.62$ ,  $p > 0.01$ ).

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics and Correlations of Study Variables

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
<b>Participants Characteristics</b>														
1. Gender	1.30	0.46	-											
2. Age (Yrs.)	29.02	5.01	-0.28**	-										
3. Qualification	15.98	0.86	-0.22*	0.28**	-									
4. Tenure (Yrs.)	3.69	2.69	-0.12	0.42**	0.08	-								
5. Relationship Duration	3.77	2.78	-0.17*	0.30**	0.09	0.57**	-							
6. Working Together	2.87	2.04	-0.14	0.39**	0.11	0.76**	0.66**	-						
<b>Close Friend's Characteristics</b>														
7. Gender	1.28	0.45	0.78**	-0.20*	-0.26**	-0.08	-0.17	-0.14	-					
8. Age (Yrs.)	29.00	5.32	-0.17	0.58**	0.24**	0.31**	0.26**	0.37**	-0.19*	-				
9. Qualification	15.62	1.60	-0.03	0.03**	0.38**	0.18*	0.07	0.17	0.02	0.40**	-			
10. Tenure (Yrs.)	3.47	2.36	-0.17*	0.39**	0.18*	0.49**	0.45**	0.69**	-0.21*	0.38**	0.13	-		
<b>Study Variables</b>														
11. TI	3.09	0.99	-0.16	0.05	-0.07	-0.01	-0.05	-0.02	-0.23**	0.12	-0.003	-0.01	(0.86)	
12. Expressed TI	3.22	1.03	-0.13	0.02	-0.02	0.01	-0.10	-0.12	-0.22*	-0.01	-0.19*	-0.11	<b>0.62**</b>	(0.83)

**Note:** TI = Turnover Intention,

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

## 5. Discussions

The main purpose of this study was to demonstrate an insight into the relationship between self-reported turnover intention of an employee and his expressed turnover intention with close friends at work. The analysis exhibits the strong support for our proposed hypothesis. The study found that there is a strong relationship between the intention to leave of employees and their expressed intention to leave the current organization where he/she is currently employed. This study is the first of its kind which examines the relationship between these two constructs. All of the previous studies assessed employees' turnover intention from their self-reported measures [e.g. 5, 10, 12, 22, 45] and reported the possibility of common method bias, which can lead towards misleading information and results. We argued that due to collective culture of South Asia, people share their feelings and intentions with others close to them. There is also possibility that employees by themselves hesitate in disclosing their plans of job quit in near future. Therefore, this study makes a remarkable contribution to the literature of turnover by proposing that an employees' quit intention can be better predicted by considering the viewpoint of their close friends at work. Our study recommends that common method bias as well as mono-method bias can be reduced by utilizing an alternative source of determining turnover intention and potential future actual turnover of employees. It is also interesting to note that in our study majority of the respondents and their close friends belong to similar gender (i.e. male) which exhibit that in collectivistic culture, mostly people prefer to develop their friendship and trust in the same/identical gender. Moreover, mostly study participants enjoy their friendship from 1 to 3 years and the duration of relationship also contributed in successful prediction of employee turnover intention from the opinion of their close mates at work. The results also indicated that higher the duration of friendship and tenure of working together, the better is the prediction ability of close mate about quit intentions.

On the practical aspect, the current study has several implications and usefulness for policymakers, company managers and practitioners. It suggests that we can collect information of turnover intention from best mates and hence provide an opportunity to minimize it at earlier stage. This study provides organizations and its managers an alternative and reliable source of predicting turnover intention of their employees. In this way, they can have information about actual turnover of its valuable workforce beforehand. It can help managers to formulate such strategies, policies, practices and preventive measures that can overcome this situation in order to retain their competitive employees and compete in the current world of globalization. Consequently, our study suggests that management should keep track of the opinion of close friends of their employees.

## 6. Limitations, Future Directions, and Conclusion

There are some limitations in our study. Firstly, given that this is a cross-sectional study, it has been suggested to also employ a longitudinal approach to examine this relationship. Secondly, this study is performed within the Asian context and collective culture. We propose that future researchers should explore the relationship between turnover intention and expressed turnover intention in the European and non-collective culture which may yield different results. Thirdly, majority respondents in our study were male employees. Future studies can include a higher number of female employees in order to enhance its generalizability for both genders. Future scholars can also examine the strength of the relationship between turnover intention and expressed turnover intention in the presence of different moderators such as job interdependence and competition among employees, etc.

In a nutshell, our study revealed that how employees' turnover intention can be accessed from the opinion of their close friends at work in collective culture, and this source would better help researchers in eliminating the potential impact of common method bias from their study findings in turnover intention research. It is recommended that future researchers should also consider different organizational, cultural, personal factors, job characteristics, and other study variables to identify the best possible source for accurate and truthful information. We are optimistic that our findings will persuade turnover scholars to continue their research in exploring our proposed relationship

and will benefit managers and associated literature by provide sound groundings for predicting turnover intentions of their worthy and proficient workforce.

## Appendix A

Expressed Turnover Intention (Modified Scale Adopted from Mobley, Horner, Hollingsworth, 1978)

No.	Items
1.	He/she often thinks about quitting his/her present job.
2.	He/she would probably look for a new job in the near future.
3.	As soon as possible, he/she would leave this organization.

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